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Legif.-Jim Skaggs. 1881.

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1918

JIM SKAGGS

—OF—

SKAGGSVILLE.

A

SIERRAN SKETCH,

—BY—

LAURENCE FIGEL.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.
PHILIP I. FIGEL, PUBLISHER.
1414 McALLISTER ST.
1881.

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FROM

THE BEQUEST OF

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL

1918

THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO
MR. WILLIAM STEADMAN,
OF GEORGETOWN,
Whose true friendship and kindness will ever be held
in grateful remembrance by the Author.

JIM SKAGGS

—OF—

SKAGGSVILLE.

—:O:—

CHAPTER I.

THE SETTLEMENT AND ITS PIONEER.

SKAGGSVILLE was built far up on the Sierras of El Dorado County. The surrounding scenery is picturesque in the extreme. Rugged peaks loom up on all sides, and from the summits to the valley of the Rubicon below, giant redwoods, pines, and graceful cedars, grow in luxuriance and cover the slopes with a rich mantle of green.

It would be difficult to find a more beautiful locality.

Some time since, I chanced upon this spot. It was a warm July afternoon, and I, heated and weary from a prolonged tramp, was resting on an eminence overlooking the valley and surroundings. I gazed at Nature in all its loveliness. The gentle Sierran zephyrs fanned my brow and wafted to me, faint, fragrant odors from the forests.

Below me, with a continuous roar, the turbulent Rubicon fell in innumerable miniature cascades, forming hissing, foaming eddies and rapids. Across the river, distinctly defined 'gainst the clear sky, those gigantic sentinels—the

Twin Buttes—reared their snow enveloped heads, and afar off, wrapped in the summer-days haze, mountains of lesser altitude and gentle undulating hills could be dimly discerned.

Pine Flat, the formidable rival of Skaggsville, was nestled away in the forest at the base of the peaks, and but for the curling wreaths of smoke that rise above the tree tops, no human being would dream of a dwelling there.

A mountain road led from Skaggsville to the valley, where a rustic bridge spans the Rubicon, affording communication to the Flat. From the latter place the road extends some miles southward to the prosperous village of Georgetown, where stages connect daily with Placerville, the nearest point on the railroad.

The "town," as the people were wont to designate Skaggsville, consisted of nine cabins. It boasted of a boarding house, (presided over by Mrs. Reilly, a good hearted, motherly woman) a saloon, a general store, and six other houses, one of which was unoccupied. The population numbered forty-seven, including four women and ten children, most all boarders at the house of the good hearted, motherly Mrs. Reilly, aforementioned.

Nailed to the door of one of the smaller cabins, this quaint sign told the stranger who could be found within:—

JIM SKAGGS,
ASSAYS. ORES. &
MINERALS.

Should we enter we find ourselves in a room of about fifteen by eighteen feet, lighted by two windows on oppos-

ite sides. To the right of the door the furnace is built, and on a shelf nearby are ranged crucibles, tongs and other requirements of an assayer. On a center table rests a copy of the Testament, a treatise on the analysis of ores, and two well thumbed volumes, minus covers and title-pages. Nailed to the bare wooden walls, are a few engravings, extracted from illustrated papers, and over the bed, poorly set off in a rough frame, hangs the painting of a lady, with a face of exquisite loveliness. The eyes are large and dark, and the lips, slightly open, reveal a row of pearly teeth. One glance at that sweet, winning countenance will not suffice us, and ere we leave, we must look upon it again and again, and long to meet the original.

Jim Skaggs before the fireplace is preparing his midday meal. He must have been at least seventy ; his long scant locks are almost white, and his eyes have a dreamy far-off look, as if in the smoke, he sees visions of the past. Deep wrinkles are graven on his well tanned face, and around his firm, large mouth and at the corners of his eyes, lurk expressions of sadness.

Years before, how long, none could state with certainty, he came to California, and in the mountain solitude built himself a cabin of rough-hewn logs. For some months he led a solitary existence, but in the course of time, gold was discovered in the vicinity, and a few pioneers, attracted by the prospect of riches, located near his abode.

Where the old man came from, and what was his motive in secluding himself from the busy world, remained a mystery. Whenever questioned concerning himself, his childhood, antecedents or the picture on the wall, he gave evasive answers. It evidently distressed him to talk of his younger

days. In his cabin he built a furnace, and although by no means an expert assayer, fully satisfied the general run of his employers. Poor Skaggs! What terrible secret could he have locked up within himself! Surely he had committed no crime! Was he a fugitive from justice! But who can tell.

The despondent old man was greatly liked—almost revered in the community, and his obdurate silence respected. Some years previous he had saved five lives. That important occurrence in the annals of the settlement, happened thus :

A wagon loaded with a crowd of prospecting miners—Skaggs among them—drawn by two spirited horses, was rapidly going down the road to the Rubicon bridge, when the brake broke, and the frightened animals dashed along the incline at an alarming rate of speed. The driver lost control of the reins and a horrible death seemed in store for the occupants of the vehicle. They were stupified and powerless to help themselves. On one side yawned a precipice, and far, far below, the tops of the trees looked up; on the other, rose a high wall of jagged basalt. The road contained many abrupt turns. The party would soon be hurled over the precipice unto sure destruction or horribly mangled against the rocks. As we stated, Skaggs was one of the number. He saw the danger and quick as thought, and at great risk of losing his balance, climbed the dashboard; then cautiously advancing along the shaft, he caught the foaming animals by the check-reins and brought them to a standstill, all heated and panting, at the most dangerous turn.

Thus bravely did he risk his life and surely was not this

just cause for him to be admired and respected by his townsmen? Was not this reason enough to call the place, hitherto without a name, after him? We certainly think so. But many dreary winters have flown by since his noble act, and Time has left his cruel marks upon his brow. He is bent with age and grief, his eyes are growing dim and soon he will be called to the home above, to that better land, where all unhappy ones, such as he, rest in peace.

seemed lost in reverie and smoke, when up jumped the one armed faro dealer, Dave Holder, by name. He was the parliamentary man of the place, as it were, and no deliberative gathering would have been complete, had not "Davy," as he was called, been among the number.

"I got an idee," he exclaimed triumphantly; "jist cum inter my head this minute."

"Well, what is it," from Belden, "we're all anxious to hear——"

"Jist this—we want a skule.!"

"A splendid idee, hooray, hooray, for Davy. 'Rah, 'rah," almost yelled Bill Simmonds.

"Yes, gentlemen, we want a skule," continued Holder, "and a teacher as runs it, and books and fixings. Our town is dificient in larning, *dreffuly* dificient; fore *we* talks of noosepapers, we want cultur. The youngsters—the future men, of our rapidly growing city, (this with a superb gesture of his only arm) must not grow up in ignorance. Now all in favor of having a skule, signify by saying aye."

Aye, went up loud and clear, from many a throat.

"The ayes have it—carried u-nan-i-mus, and now I am thinking a teacher can be got without much trouble. Appoint a committee of two or three, to go to 'Frisco and engage one. They can make him a temptin' offer of the gold, and not one in a hundred will refuse."

George Belden seemed dissatisfied; he drummed impatiently upon the table with his knuckles, and gave his mustache impatient little twitches. His discontent gave vent in words.

"A school is good—tiptop, but is a man a novelty, pooh.

There's plenty in this district, but we'd like the scarce article, for a teacher. I see by your smiles you kinder catch my meaning; yes, a *school-marm*, is what we want," and the hazel eyes fairly glistened at the thought, "not old or ugly, but young and purty, and modest-like. We have women enough in town, but," and he cautiously looked around, to see if any of these creatures might be present, "they'd never win a prize for good-looks——"

Mrs. Reilly turned very red in the face, and almost choked, with rage; she could not utter the burning words that were upon the tip of her tongue.

"Except," continued George, his eye falling upon the enraged proprietress of the hotel, "our lady—Mrs. Reilly, blushing, there."

Flattery has a wonderful effect on some people. It certainly had on Mrs. Reilly. The angry expression on her face gave way to a broad grin. Now the words came, in the richest of brogues, but they were neither angry nor bitter.

"Ah, shure, yer flather me, Mister George, yer flather me, so ye do."

Of course, this little incident was greeted with ill suppressed laughter, but the woman, dear creature, never for an instant imagined what caused it.

When the levity had somewhat subsided, Holder, the parliamentarian, was again to the front.

"All in favor of having a gal, come to town and teach, signify by raising their right hand."

Every man there "signified," and some raised both hands.

"Carried u-nan-i-mus," cried Dave, with the peculiar

drawl he always gave that word, and then continued, "Now I, being the sole mover of this grand plan, whereby we are to have a skule, do hereby appoint myself and Bill Simmonds as the committee, wot goes to 'Frisco and arranges matters, and I hereby state that we will do it to the best of our ability. Now all in favor of *that* move, say aye."

Probably he wasn't liked as much as he should have been, or the citizens of Skaggsville did not care to be represented in the Pacific metropolis by a one-armed man. At any rate only one third of the men, responded with the necessary "aye."

He seemed taken aback for the moment, but then he looked around, with a benign smile on his face, and exclaimed without so much as a blush, "Carried u-nan-i-mus, and now I move we walk up to the bar and wet our whistles. I being duly and fairly elected, do hereby set up the drinks." It is hardly necessary to state, that they quickly forgot, they had not really appointed him, and they moved to the bar quite suddenly.

Mrs. Reilly filled the glasses; the tumblers were raised on high, and the fiery liquid coursed down all gullets, in the twinkling of an eye.

* * * * *

Next evening the committee set out. They were seated in the town's one vehicle, and were soon on the road to the Flat and Georgetown.

The former place was one blaze of light. Bonfires were burning and the people were holding high carnival. It was a grand jubilee in consequence of the founding of the "*Pine Flat Avalanche*."

" Say, Holder," Simmonds whispered in his companion's ear.

" Wot is it, Bill ?" was the reply.

" Them fellows is got another wrinkle. Can't you hear."

" Wot do yer mean?"

" A brass band!"

So they hev, by gosh—sh—; all right Billy, old boy, in that case we'll fetch back *two* attractions—the gal, and—and—lem me see——"

" A tight-rope walker?"

" Naw," contemptuously.

" A menagerie?"

" Jist it—we'll pack back a menagerie, as I live."

And shortly after, the wagon sped along the valley road. The west-bound train was to be reached at Georgetown, and the horses were urged to their fastest. The strains of the discordant band grew fainter and fainter, as Pine Flat was left further in the distance, and soon the notes heard no more.

CHAPTER III.

A GLOOMY PICTURE. A LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE.

Ruin threatened Skaggsville. Several months before some of the richest claims had ceased to yield their average quantity of gold, and had to be abandoned. And now complaints were daily made, that this claim or that, was well-nigh exhausted, or yielded a smaller percentage of gold than in days gone by. Almost daily, locations were given up, and the possessors vanished for fields anew.

To be sure, other parts of El Dorado contained rich gold ore in vast quantities, and our settlers could easily have gone thither, but they disliked to leave the town. They were proud of it. They loved its every log and rafter, and were they to abandon it, would virtually leave Pine Flat master of the field, and the objective point of immigration.

A little gold was left, the miners said, and they would endeavor to hold out as long as possible, and who knows but what some discoveries of rich ledges of gold-bearing rock, in the vicinity, might yet be made. They earnestly prayed and hoped for such a fortunate occurrence.

* * * *

The committee had been gone three weeks, and everyone was in great expectation. The town did not boast of a

post-office, but John Barker, the proprietor of the team, regularly drove to Georgetown for the mail.

One bright morn, a letter came, addressed to the "Citizens of Skaggsville." It ran thus:—

FRISCO, JULY 16, 1878.

Fellow Citizens :

we are Glad to inform you that we have met with Suckcess in this parts we got a gal as is willing to teetch the kids. we'll pack her up with us tomorrer. were dead broke, our Dust is gave out. dont serd no mour as we come up to morrer. The gal lent us some coin. it takes heaps to live here but we seen the elefant. the gal is an angel. She was a governess--that's a tetcher--for a tony family out in a street they calls Wan Ness Avenue. but when she read our notis in Kronikle she tackled to us at onct. Drink our helth,

Yours faithfully,

BILL SIMMONDS,

DAVE HOLDER, the Comitee.

Wasn't the town happy, then. Even Skaggs left his hot furnace, that was burning the very life out of him, to join in the general festivity. Indeed, he seemed happier than for many a long day. This portended nought but good, so the people said.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARRIVAL OF MISS MERVILLE.

The next day was one of festivity ; no work was accomplished. Skaggsville had quite a holiday appearance. A faded flag fluttered in the breeze, and every cabin was decked in evergreens. At early morn, the wagon had been sent to Georgetown, to receive the arrivals, but as yet it had not returned. Night was fast approaching, and the sky was tinged with that beautiful, brilliant red, peculiar to a western sunset.

George Belden was appointed orator of the day ; all that devolved upon him, was to deliver the address of welcome. Majestically striding about, his tall, well-formed figure, shown to advantage, he was the admired of all. The time was fast approaching when he was to distinguish himself, and set the settlement wild with rapture.

Several inquisitive ones, drawn to town through curiosity, no doubt, were in attendance from the "Flat."

Illiterate Ted Slocum was in his glory. Mounted upon a stump, and gesticulating wildly, he was lecturing a delighted audience, on the good to accrue from the school, and the blessings of "edicashun." But his outburst of eloquence terminated very suddenly indeed, for a

welcome and long expected sound, was heard on the Rubicon bridge. It was the unmistakable noise made by horses hoofs, and wagon-wheels.

Expectation was at its height ; and five minutes after, the wagon rattled into camp. With a crack of the whip, and a prolonged "whoa," from the driver, the horses stopped.

The vehicle contained a lady, clothed in a tasty dress of brown, and a veil of like color, the happy, smiling "Committee," the driver, trunks, luggage of school requirements, and a mysterious canvas-covered box.

Holder and his companion alighted. Ditto the driver. The young lady was about to do likewise, and had already placed one foot upon the wheel, when the orator of the day advanced, or was rather, pushed to the front. All necks were craned, and the youngsters were raised on their parents shoulders, in order to gain the first glimpse at the future instructor.

Belden occupied considerable time in clearing his throat, and nervously fumbled with a rose he wore. He was about to make his first public speech, poor fellow, and at the last moment he lost faith in himself. However he cast his eyes on a certain pebble on the ground and desperately struck out :—

"This is—a great—indeed, I might say—the greatest event that our town has—has ever seen. Our little community here bid you a—a hearty welcome, and—and receive you with open arms." (Surely he was not addressing the pebble. He certainly looked very intently at it.)

Cries of "good—good," from the men, followed the latter part of his extremely eloquent address. He took courage and continued ;—

"We hev long wished for such as you to—to inculcate the useful art of larning to the youngsters as well as the older boys——"

Here the lady raised her veil and revealed a sweet, girlish face, fair, but slightly flushed ; with pride no doubt. Her soft roguish brown eyes sparkled, and her wav tresses were brushed carefully back from her fair young brow.

As she raised her veil, a low moan was heard, and those who chanced to be in the rear, noticed Skaggs turn deadly pale, put his hand to his brow, totter, and helplessly sink upon one knee. He murmured something indistinguishable, and was led bemoaning, to his cabin.

As soon as the young teacher revealed her face, a murmur of admiration was raised.

At last Belden's eyes wandered from the pebble, and he raised them from the ground to the pretty little foot upon the wheel. then they wandered up, higher and higher to the slender waist, and at last they looked upon the fair, young face. The hazel eyes and the laughing brown ones met. Poor George was smitten. He was Cupid ensnare ! already.

"So much beauty," he rapturously exclaimed, "so much beauty we didn't reckon to see, and you will have a big class. Wont she, boys."

"You bet," came the response, rather more forcible than elegant, but appreciated by the schoolmarm nevertheless.

"And now in conclushun, let me menshun, that though we hev rough faces and beards, and are given, jist a little to gamblin', we hev good hearts, every one of us, and we will respect and pectect you to the best of our ability ; and you

will never want for gold, while there is a hand here to strike a pick."

The rosebud lips opened, and these words, sweetly spoken, issued forth ;—

"I can hardly thank you for your flattering reception. In future days, I will look upon this occasion, as the happiest day of my life. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you, kind friends, and hope I may merit the welcome you accord me. I am tired from travel, and with your kind permission, will retire to the room provided for me."

At the conclusion of this little speech a shout went up— a loud and hearty hurrah, that echoed from hill to dale and made the visitors from Pine Flat feel—well they *didn't* feel in the best of spirits, that's sure. A dozen hands were raised on high to lift the lady down, but George Belden, taller than the rest, bore off the prize, and landed her, very gently upon the ground.

A sweet "thank you, sir," rewarded him for his pains.

Miss Alice Merville, for such, dear reader, I had forgotten to tell you, was our heroine's name, was taken possession of by Mrs. Reilly, who showed her the various points of interest, and then installed her, in a cozy room next her own.

The wagon was being unloaded, and a gaping crowd was around it, exceedingly curious to ascertain the contents of the canvas-covered box.

The covering was at last removed by Bill Simmonds, who triumphantly looked about him, when lo and behold, what was revealed but—"the menagerie."

It consisted of a large wooden barred cage, divided into two compartments. In one was an American eagle, a

beautiful, fierce looking bird, with a rim of white around his neck; in the other was a grinning monkey, black as coal, and a face as near human as possible. Yes, this was the wonder! The novelty! The menagerie! The juvenile members of our model mining camp yelled themselves hoarse with glee. Beer and whiskey ran like water, revelry was kept up till daybreak. The visitors from the rival town slunk off, unobserved in the dead of night, and Skaggs-ville's memorable day had passed forever.

CHAPTER V.

CUPID PLAYS SOME PRANKS.

The unoccupied cabin was renovated, furnished with all necessities, and before long, it was transformed into a neat looking school-house. The class was small at first, but after a few months the "old boys" began to drop in occasionally. They hinted that their knowledge of writing and 'rithmetic was getting rusty, and soon pretty Miss Merville had quite a respectable-sized class.

She was greatly liked. In dealing with children she had a cheerful, kindly way, that at once won their young hearts, and the little ones soon grew to love her.

Here let me state that she was the object of considerable attention from every unmarried man in camp; each one desperately strove to be the lucky one. For a time none seemed favored a particular, more than the other. She treated all the gallant fellows with the greatest of provoking indifference. These rough, earnest admirers rather amused her by their passionate outbursts of love, awkward stammering, illiterate declarations, for the most part. But after a while one seemed favored, unmistakably more than his

less fortunate companions. That lucky individual was none other than George Belden. While delivering the address, on that memorable day of Miss Melville's triumphant *entree* into the settlement, his eyes met her beautiful ones. It was at this point that the sly rascal, Cupid, crept up, without warning, and with aim unerring, levelled a dart at the heart of unsuspecting George. It hit the target, and from that time, he was desperately, passionately in love.

To be sure he had acquired the blunt, hearty ways of the camp, but then he was so tall and handsome, true and manly withal, and when he spoke, his sincere eyes looked upon you so unflinchingly, honestly and fearlessly, that what girl would not love him.

Tete-a-tete after *tete-tete* had been held—so the gossips had it—and when a fresh bouquet from George, adorned our teacher's school-room desk, day after day, rumor said he had asked, and had not been refused. Perhaps the gossips were right; perhaps they were wrong. At any rate it does not concern us, and *we* will not attempt to pry into such affairs.

Jim Skaggs was rarely seen outside of his cabin at day. In five short months he had greatly changed. He was completely broken down; his face was haggard, and his locks matted and unkempt. Since that miserable night, that he was led to his cabin, he seemed to take no interest in existence. On that eventful eve seven months ago, no one looked to him, indeed everyone was so engaged, that Skaggs was not thought of. Should anyone have glanced into his room, he would have seen him with a wild, indescribable expression upon his face, nervously pacing the floor.

Ever and anon he would dolefully shake his head and utter passionate words.

“Ah, God,” he exclaimed once, “why do I suffer this—she is come—how like Edna—how like her——” and he cast his eyes upon the painting over his bed. Then he bent his head down low and sobbed, and the wind whistled without, and the pines and the cedars, bending in the breeze, moaned back his grief. It was not till morning that he threw himself upon his cot, for a few hours of broken, unrefreshing slumber.

That the sight of Alice, had affected him deeply and strangely, was certain ; but what relation she held to him, and the why and the wherefore of his strange action, was an unexplainable mystery. The few who saw Skaggs totter and fall, merely took it for an attack of weakness. That was all. The teacher did not enter their thoughts, in this connection whatever.

* * * * *

As day passed day, the aspect grew more and more serious. Each report from the diggings was more discouraging than the preceding one. The last nugget had been extracted, and one by one, our friends returned empty-handed, threw down their implements, in despair and talked of abandoning Skaggsville forever. A few localities contained gold, but in quantities so trifling to the ton, that the extraction would not sufficiently recompense a person for the labor. Still the miners lingered—waiting perhaps for some rich strike to be made, but such a discovery seemed unlikely, and from present appearances it looked as if the time would soon be at hand, for the final packing up.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE PROPOSES.

It was a splendid summer's day. The birds were merry-making in the tree tops, and their sweet trills and warbling resounded. Merry peals of childish laughter echoed throughout the woods; a sweeter sound by far than the notes of the birds. Alice accompanied by a few of her younger charges, not old enough for school, was taking a summer day's ramble.

How happy and free from care she seemed. The roses were upon her cheeks. On her head, set just a little back, was a sun-hat, with beautiful blue trimmings, a trifle coquettish, but very becoming. Two refractory little ringlets of brown hair, *would* persist in playing upon her fair brow, much as she endeavored to make them rest content beneath her hat.

In one hand she held a closed parasol, and in the other was something heavy, enveloped in her handkerchief, which she held by its four corners.

She was humming a tune to herself—a song of happy summer, of birds and flowers. The most delightful part of

the wood was reached. It was like a garden in fairyland. Wide-spreading forest giants kept out the glare of the sun ; delicate scented wild-flowers covered the ground. The youngsters trotted on ahead, chasing butterflies, squirrels, and cottontails.

All at once she stopped quite suddenly, and uttered a startled little scream. Hidden behind a tree, and sprawled out at full length was an animal, and a human one at that. That being was Belden. There he lay, a book before him, chin resting on his hands, elbows on ground. His hat was on the ground, and the soft breeze toyed with his chestnut curls. In an instant he was upon his feet.

"Why *how* you frightened me. I thought you were a bear," was Alice's exclamation.

"A bear, do I look so much like one," he asked.

"Oh no," was her answer, "I don't mean *that*. I came upon you so suddenly and only saw the top of your curly head that I must confess I was considerably frightened. If it be not an impertinent question may I ask the name of the book you seem so deeply interested in."

"The name—'Udolpho and Rosalind'—picked the book up in Georgetown. Splendid ! That Cupid must be a funny fellow. Don't you think so?"

"Why Mr. George Belden, what in the world has got into you, reading love stories. Why what do you know about Cupid—the dear little fellow—A pretty Udolpho you'd make, with your cowhide boots, your red shirt and belt with that horrid pistol—ugh—a brigand chief rather," and she gave vent to a peal of silvery laughter, and contin-

ued, " then who would your Rosalind be—the widow Mrs. Reilly, good creature, 'to be sure."

"Mrs. Reilly—never," he vehemently answered, "I've loved but one woman, and she stands before me now. Alice I love you more than I can tell. I'm kinder rough, and unlearned for such an angel as you and can't frame fine sentences and use big words like an educated chap, but if you will consent to be my wife—my Rosalind, I think—I *know* I could make you very happy. Will you have George Belden? Could you not love him—just a little?" and as he concluded he gazed upon her, hat in hand, earnestly, fondly, awaiting the reply which was to make him the happiest of men or the very opposite.

The young teacher cast down her eyes and a rich blush suffused her countenance. She tightly compressed her lips and a troubled expression flitted across her face. But only for a moment. She roguishly raised her eyes to his and quite startled him by the query—

"What if I refuse?"

And he answered very passionately,—“It will make me very miserable.”

“George” she said, “would you consent to wed a girl without knowing her history, or why she is alone in the world, who perhaps has a secret, which unintentionally disclosed might cause you misery—”

“If such a girl were you Alice, I would, and my love for her would be as lasting as the snow on the Sierran peaks” was his fervent reply.

“Hush do not speak so loud” she exclaimed playfully, placing her hand over his mouth, “you talk so

passionately—an eavesdropper might be near you know, and that would never do. Now since an unfavorable answer will make you so utterly miserable, I will have compassion on you and give you a reply on some other occasion,” very softly, “call to-morrow eve and you will have my answer; but change the subject ” she continued briskly, “come—do. Guess what’s in my handkerchief,” and she held it by the corners and waved it tauntingly before his eyes.

“A bird?” he asked

“No.”

“It is a plant?”

“Wrong again, Mr. Udolpho—guess again.”

“A pine cone?”

“No-o.”

“Well it beats me. What is it?”

“Its gold—pure gold,” was her triumphant announcement, as she disclosed the shining metal. That didn’t electrify him as she had anticipated it would.

“Well,” she exclaimed—rather impatiently, isn’t *that* something—stupid?”

“Your pay?” he asked.

“My pay!” in genuine surprise, “why no; I *found* the gold—way past the lightning charred redwoods, near the cave. There’s more where I got this. It looks like gold, but I’ll not be too sure.”

This announcement *did* astonish him, and he fairly danced with glee.

With two strides he was at her side, and ere she knew it,

the rascal caught her in his strong arms, and the fluttering bird could not free herself. He imprinted the first love kiss square on her red, ripe lips—a sounding smack—and little, treckled Jimmy Reilly, and the other youngsters widely opened their eyes and stared. Another he gave her on the brow, and one on her cheek, and heaven only knows when this delicious pastime would have terminated, but a baby's pceevish voice cried out—

“Want to do 'ome-'ungry-tum Alice, tum,” and the little wretch vigorously tugged at Alice's dress.

At the sound Sir Udolpho started, suspended operations, and scampered off on an urgent visit to Georgetown. When he had gone a considerable distance, he turned, kissed his hand to the young teacher, and cheerily called back—

“Alice love' take the ore to Skaggs, and if he says its gold—gold it is, and then hurrah for a glorious fourth.”

The whole affair occupied so little time, and she had been so taken by surprise, that—well she was angry at herself, smoothed back her disarranged tresses, adjusted her crushed hat, laughed, then cried, and finally laughed, again very happily. No doubt she liked her little *Affaire d'amour* after all, but when she retired for the night, it was her avowed intention to make handsome George suffer a little, for the liberty he had taken.

Around an embankment another turn was made, and the Twin Buttes were plainly seen. So ruddy was the glare, objects on the mountain side were discerned as plain as by the light of day.

Above the din of horses' hoofs, and the rattling of the wagons, above the roar of the fire, a hoarse cry went up from Dave Holder, that almost made every heart stand still.

"Good God, boys, *its Skaggsville!*" was what he said. And indeed this dread announcement was but too true.

With the noise of countless demons the devouring element licked up everything in its path, and hot cinders fell for some distance around.

The doomed settlement was almost reached ; the Rubicon was crossed.

From Pine Flat, the night wind wafted across the vale the noise of coarse songs—of drunken fights, curses, and brutal laughter. A few dark objects—human beings, closely muffled up—glided over the bridge, fearfully and cowering, to that hated place.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEARFUL NIGHT.

When the vehicles finally came tearing into the burning town, not a soul was to be seen. There was no time to think what had become of Skaggs, Simmonds or the rest.

Already four cabins, among them Mrs. Reilly's hotel, were burned to the ground. The poor woman had lost all that was precious and dear to her, and was inconsolable ; it was with the utmost difficulty that she could be prevented from running into the smouldering ruins, to save some cherished keepsake or valuable object.

Gently George took his young wife aside. and told her to keep up courage, and something might yet be saved, and spoke other comforting words to her.

The heat was intense, and Alice and the other woman retreated backwards. With eager eyes, she watched her husband's every movement ; never had he seemed so brave to her, as at this trying time.

Still the furiously fought battle kept on. The fire-demon stretched forth his hands, and blew his hot breath upon those arrayed against him. Bucket after bucket of water was emptied but to no avail. Hose might have done some effective work, but alas ! there was none for miles around.

One more house was a ruin. The street was piled up with articles luckily saved. The miners were battering down a cabin to save the rest, and their regular, telling blows, resounded.

"Those at Pine Flat," thundered Belden, between well directed blows with an axe, on the walls of Skaggs' cabin, "must account for this night's work."

"You're right thar, stranger," said a person in a harsh, unfamiliar voice, and a tall, bearded man stood before him. In an instant the fellow was seized by ready hands. Although he did not quite have the look of a criminal, his face was anything but prepossessing.

His feature were somewhat coarse, his lips thin and about his mouth, he had a hard, unrelenting expression ; his beard was rough, and of a sandy color, and beneath his bushy eye brows, small, restless grey eyes gave furtive glances at his captors. Miner fashion, his pants were tucked in his boots and under his unbuttoned coat, appeared a flannel shirt, and leathern belt, in which he carried a revolver. His head was covered by a low hat, with a stiff, wide brim.

"Did you fire the town?" asked Belden, scarce able to contain his fury.

"No," came the answer, in a swaggering way, "those that came before ; but hark you, if *they* hadn't, I would.

If I hadn't been so infernally stoopid, and thought you fellows belonged to my crowd, I wouldn't a fallin' into your hands. Whar's your gold?—past 'the lightning charred redwoods,' eh!—is it—ask Skaggs—he's to blame for them flames thar—not I, lemme go, I say—" and as he concluded, he struggled to free himself, but it was useless.

Then he gave a defiant glance around. The place was light as day, and his eyes rested upon the little group of women—huddled together, some distance off.

As she caught sight of his features, Alice gave a shriek, and to the astonishment of all, turned and fled, as she did so, crying out in startled tones :—

"Save me from him—save me."

At the sound, the strange man taking his captors by surprise, wrenched himself loose, and a muttered oath escaped him.

"Curse you," he cried in frenzy, "at last you are in my clutches." and he swiftly pursued the fleeing figure.

Fear gave wings to Alice's flight, but how could she, untrained as she was for such exercise, keep her muscular pursuer far behind. Panting and furious he was gaining upon her, as she sped down the road. She was well-nigh exhausted, and almost sank down from fatigue and fear, but she fancied she felt her pursuer's hot breath upon her checks and this goaded her on.

Following in the footsteps of the villain, and rapidly nearing him were George Belden and several others. * *

They had reached the road's most dismal part, where the fire did not penetrate. A shot might bring the fellow to a halt, but then Alice was just ahead, and she might be injured. * *

The bushes parted ; a dark form emerged, and with much delay and with seeming exertion, lifted Alice upon his shoulders, and tottered painfully on with the precious, unresisting burden.

At this junction, several of the men caught up with the pursuer, but before they knew it, he had torn his pistol from his belt, and took a hasty aim at the retreating figures. A flash, a report rang out, and a moan of pain was heard.

The unknown stumbled feebly on, and disappeared in the wildwood.

The villain was disarmed and after much resistance, he was securely bound. Belden, almost frenzied, held him in a vice-like grasp.

Woe to the evil-doer in a frontier mining camp. The formalities of law are discarded far too often, and meet and speedy punishment is accorded to serious offenders. Lynch law is often resorted to. Skaggsville, although composed mostly of honest, true men, proved no exception to the general rule.

A rope was adjusted around the miscreant's neck. In the struggle his hat had fallen off ; he scowled darkly at those around him.

"Who are you," hissed George between his teeth, "that dares come here, and chase that girl—my wife?"

"Well if that aint cool," was the reply. It don't matter to you who I am, but that women happens to be *my* wife—hear me stranger—my lawful wife."

At this announcement Belden turned positively livid, and he clenched his hands till the nails lacerated his flesh. Not that he at first believed the fellow's words, but they seemed to him, so dreadful and unreal. Then his thoughts wandered to Alice's glance of recognizance. She surely had seen the man before, and had much to fear, or why did she flee in such affright, from his hated presence.

Were the man's charges true—but no, he could not, would not, believe him—a more true and honorable woman than Alice, never lived. Was the fellow a maniac or what? Where was his young wife now?

All these questions and many more came crowding themselves into his mind. Heaven only knows the agony and heart-pangs he suffered then. "Scoundrel," was all the word that he could utter.

"Oh, you needn't get so excited over it. She deserted me, and a pretty hunt I've had the last year—drat her—the good for nothing. If I'd caught her, she'd got a lesson she would not forget in a hurry—it would last her for a lifetime. She's nothing but an adventuress, with a pretty face."

"Were you not bound and helpless," exclaimed George hotly, "I'd make you take back every cursed word you've said——"

"Mebbe you would and mebbe you wouldn't. *I'd* have something to say in that case myself, stranger. But come boys, stop your nonsense ; let me be off. This rope don't feel comfortable. Take it off, and go help the others put out the fire." (with a sneer.)

"You'd better give up the thought of going free, for as sure as my name's Dave Holder, you hangs at once," was that worthy's exclamation.

"I don't like the wicked gleam in your eyes, but you don't—can't mean it. All that I've said about the girl is the truth—the solemn truth, and as I stand here before you all, I swear it."

"We mean every word we say," was the curt rejoinder. "Now, ready boys." The rope was placed over a limb and pulled slightly.

"Hold—curses upon you all—I see you will have my death to atone for. It seems too bad to hunt so long for the women, and almost when I have my hands on her, to let her escape—but what does it matter—I reckon I scared the life out of her, and I hope she took a plunge in the Rubicon, to escape me never to rise,—I did not fire the town I said it once before, but I goaded the men of Pine Flat to do it—and Skaggs was the cause—*he* needs the hemp, not I."

Then he ceased his swaggering, rough talk, and his voice softened down, and tears welled up in his eyes. He wept for the first time in many day. "I have a mother

way back in Connecticut—old and feeble, most tottering on the verge of the grave. It's a long time since she has heard from me. Mebbe she thinks I'm dead. In my pocket you will find a pile of gold, sewn up in a buckskin pouch—kin I trust you lads—I hate you all like poison and dying, will curse you all—but will you send it to her—the address is on a card in my coat. Say yes, and I can die content,”

“You kin rely on us all. It is your last request. Trust us,” was the reply, and the pouch and address was taken from him.

They lynched him and after a few spasmodic movements, all was over. Then they left him, dangling twixt heaven and earth, swinging backward and forward with the wind, and the limb, bending beneath the weight, creaked dismally. With hideous cries, the birds of prey, careered around the swaying form.

The thought of Alice—little angel, so dear and precious to him, came into George's mind. During the day she had been so full of mirth and life and gayity, it was very hard to believe she had been so ruthlessly torn away. Who the mysterious rescuer was and whither he brought his burden, he knew not. Certainly he had conveyed her to a place of safety. But where, was the question. A friend, he must have surely been, else why did the man now lynched, send a shot after him?

With lantern in hand, and accompanied by several others, George set out in search of the missing one.

* * * *

Skaggsville was rapidly burning away. The menagerie had fallen over, and somehow it was crushed beneath a fallen rafter. The monkey, poor beast was wedged in, so that he could not move ; his cries—almost human—were pitiful to hear, but he was soon suffocated to death. The eagle, more fortunate than his neighbor, was free again in his native element, and flapping his wings, joyfully regained the upper air.

* * * *

Morning dawned at last. A few smouldering ruins were all that was left of the once peaceful little settlement. Strange to say, Skaggs' cabin was the only one, not totally burned to the ground. The north wall with the picture hanging over the bed, a small corner of the roof, and the furnace, remained. The only injury received was a severe scorching. The men, black, tired and blistered from the heat and fire, utterly disheartened, threw themselves upon the ground for a well-earned rest.

Belden's footsore companions returned empty-handed, and shortly after, he came himself, having met with no trace of Alice or the rest.

CHAPTER X.

A REVELATION.

The homeless ones were made as comfortable as possible. Many had lost all their possessions. A few liberal-hearted friends in Georgetown quickly dispatched a wagonload of clothing and provisions to the afflicted settlement.

There was two things which greatly puzzled everybody ; that was what had become of old Jim and those that remained with him to guard the town ; then the culprit's bitter condemnation of Skaggs. Those from the Flat applied the match, so how could he be guilty of such an act. Could it be possible that he or his companions had any petty spite to gratify ? But no, the old man was too universally respected and beloved to let any such thought concerning him, take possession of anyones mind.

To endeavor if possible to solve the riddle, a number went to the new found diggings. The ground was much disturbed, and pickaxes were scattered around.

It was a sandy soil, and evidently incapable of bearing any precious metal. Strewn here and there were a few rich nuggets, which when gathered, filled two ordinary sized hats. A battered box of japanned tin lay open on the ground, and the cover bore the name of the founder of Skaggsville. Though hunting diligently for a couple of hours, the workmen wended their way back to camp, unable to come across the expected vein of gold.

Thus were blasted in one miserable night the bright prospects of a glorious future. But two days ago, how much hope had throbbed in every breast; now, over all, there reigned the darkest of despair.

Many hot-headed ones were for taking vengeance upon Pine Flat at once, but the sensible one counseled order and would countenance no such thing. The gold supply had proven a failure, and as in this unlucky strait, it was the intention to leave the place, they should not cause more suffering or loss of life. But ere they turned their backs upon the loved spot, there was to be one large search party for the young wife and the others. A couple of shanties were hastily erected for shelter, the ruins of Skaggs' cabin were walled in, wisely too, and the fire was soon blazing away, for who knows but what Alice might be ill, and entitled to every comfort.

The thought of her was uppermost in George's mind. Was she lost to him forever? Had she, as the villain wished, almost crazed, escaped him, and taken a plunge into the turbulent river, to be swiftly whirled down the seething water, over rocks and falls, and finally thrown up all mangled on the banks? At about five o'clock in the evening as the search expedition was about starting out, a bare-footed boy, hatless and panting, came running into camp and dropped a letter. It was addressed to George Belden. He eagerly grasped it. It was from Alice. He could not mistake the handwriting and a glad cry escaped him, as he tore the envelope open. It was hastily written in pencil on a common piece of paper and read as follows :

DEAR GEORGE :

Ere this, you have no doubt, heard all. That man is my lawful husband—it is too fearfully true. Would to heaven—but no I will not say it. Do not, I implore you, dear husband, think me capable of deliberately deceiving you. When I became your wife, I thought that he was dead. My life has not been a happy one. I never knew a father's love, and mother, dear, long-suffering mother was very ill, and in poor circumstances for a time. The man—John Rollin was a distant relation of hers—had money, and in order to keep the wolf from the door, I was forced to marry him.

He was a drunkard, and spent his nights in gambling and drinking. I lived in a cheerless, unpainted house, without flowers or grounds with no comforts whatever. It was truly a drunkard's home. When he returned, in his brutal moods, he invariably cursed and beat me. and took from me many little trinkets and articles of jewelry. I did not tell dear mother of my trials, for she was upon a bed of sickness, and I feared the recital of ~~my trials~~ might make her worse.

It was about this time that my persecutor was away upon a longer spree than usual. I had not seen him for a week. After lingering for a few days, mother died. I was at her bedside at the end, and she placed her emaciated hands upon my head and blessed her girl, and for

gave her husband for a great wrong—she never told me what it was—he had done her.

I never saw the tyrant again, till yesterday. The day after mother's death, a servant ran to the house, and told me he was dead—killed outright in a drunken fight. I left the hated place forever. I had rich relations—but they did not know of me, and I had too much pride to ask them for help. Then I stopped with a school-girl friend in New York for a few days, and receiving a position as governess in California, I came west.

But now, just when I have reached the height of my happiness—he must step in and force himself before me—oh! it is too cruel.

I am so miserable, I know not what to do. I care not what becomes of me. Death would be welcome. While he lives it is better—better for us both, though it nearly kills me to write it—that we should not meet. If it was not for dear, old Jim Skaggs, who is cruelly wounded and needs my help, I would leave this miserable place forever.

I remain, in haste, thine ever,
ALICE.

As the reader bent over he could scarcely restrain his agitation. Turning, he found the messenger had vanished as quickly as he came. But he knew Alice was safe, and all unmindful of the dark, rolling clouds above, and of the heavy drops of rain that began to saturate the letter, he sent up thanks to the Almighty.

CHAPTER XI.

FOUND. "CALLED HOME."

The rain fell in torrents, and ever and anon a flash of lurid lightning illumined the place. It was growing dark, and those, that composed the search party, set out. For hours they wandered through the forests, and laboriously beat their way through the brushwood; every sylvan retreat where a human being would likely seek shelter from the fury of the storm, every nook and corner, they looked into and examined, but all in vain. Dripping wet and in despair, the men were about to acknowledge themselves completely baffled, and talked about instituting another search on the morrow, in the broad light of day.

The thunder kept up its deafening uproar. There was a flash, a thunderbolt was hurled down, and a tall forest king that had for ages, defied the tempest's fury, was scorched from tip to root. With a heavy thud, it fell, all shattered across the roadway.

Suddenly there was another lightning flash, followed in rapid succession by another and another, and the vicinity was made bright, for an instant, by the lurid glare.

Upon the ground, in full view of the despondent group consulting together, and plainly discerned in the levin's light, was a body. Then all was darkness again, and the thunder's roar seemed afar off; for the rumbling was but faintly heard.

The little band approached the spot, and the lantern's glare was turned upon a form. It was the pioneer of Skaggsville. They knew the loved face too well to be mistaken. Belden bent over to look at the countenance; then a joyous cry escaped him. "Found at last!" he exclaimed in exultant tones, and he unclasped two cold hands—woman's hands—small and soft, and gently removed from Skaggs' neck, the arms of his young wife—his lost one, and thanked God in his heart, that she was restored to him. In one of her hands she tightly clutched a paper; he withdrew it and carefully placed it in his pocket.

Then he tenderly lifted the dripping form, so cold and wet and still, and imprinted passionate kisses upon the beautiful face, so deathlike, in its paleness. On his way to the sheltered cabin, beating his way against the wind and rain, he passed the gibbet tree, and shuddered, but a secret joy thrilled through him, when he reflected that the would-be destroyer of his happiness, was no more.

Mrs. Reilly, (a good nurse she proved) was promptly on hand, and with a woman's tender care, soon had Alice thoroughly warmed and snugly tucked in the only bed, saved from the fire,

Skaggs, they placed upon soft buffalo robes, and his garments were dried. A pallor was upon his face, and his eyes were closed as if in peaceful slumber. His friends gathered around him. Ted Slocum placed one hand under the sufferer's gray head, and raised it.

"Jim, old pard," he said and his voice trembled, "wake up—Skaggs—dear old man." Then in husky tones, "God, how cold and still he is—is this death—oh! it can not be—it can not be." He bent over, and laid his hand upon the assayer's heart.

"He is not dead," he said, "but I kin hardly feel the beating of his heart. I'm afeard old, Jim Skaggs' soul is going out to the Great beyond—but he may yet be spared to us—for the love of God, fetch some liquor—make it a trifle warm." It was handed to him in an instant, and forced through the silent one's lips, and those assembled around his couch had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes. A shudder seemed to pass over his frame.

"Jim, old boy—don't you know your friends," Slocum asked. "Don't you know me—its Teddy wats talking—look up Jim——"

The old man gave a deep drawn sigh, but he did not recognize those near him—his dearest and most steadfast friends. Reason had fled.

Through a cruel wound upon his temple, his life's blood was slowly oozing out.

"This pain—oh—this pain," he feebly said.

"You'll soon be well an' around again—speak to us."

But he did not answer. His thoughts wandered.

"They are calling me," he faintly murmured, "hear them over there—hear them—let me—go to them."

"No one is calling, Jim—it is but the wind outside. You are in your cabin, with your friends," said Slocum.

The rain incessantly pattered, pattered on the roof, and the wind dismally sighed and moaned. Without, all was darkness, and the thunder's roar had ceased. A bright, log fire blazed away in the brick furnace, and the ruddy glare fell upon those gathered around Skaggs' dying bed. Rough men were they, and bearded and bronzed, but they loved the old man as a brother, and there was not an eye but what was wet with weeping. Belden, seated near the head of Alice's bed, with one hand upon her wavy ringlets, had his face buried in the pillow.

Then the pioneer spoke again, very low and feebly, and those around, bent low to catch his words. His thoughts wandered. A smile seemed to light up the face for an instant and he partly raised himself upon his elbow, and pointed at some unknown object—in the dark corner of the room.

"Yes—yes—they are calling me now" he said, "see them over there—the pines—my pines—hear their murmurings—for me—my whispering pines—so— I am resting—beneath them—now."

He fell back upon the robes again, and his sufferings and his troubles were over at last. Perhaps it were better that he was dead; better by far for him to be sleeping in his

grave, than having life without his reason. But had he peacefully passed away without revealing the secret of his life?

A miner with an honest look on his suntanned face, bent over, and placed his ear to the old man's breast. Then rising he sadly shook his head.

"Is he called home?" someone asked him in a low, eager voice.

"Yes—poor Skaggs—is dead," came the reply huskily spoken. Then the miners, one by one, bent o'er the dead and grasped his hand, and looked upon the careworn face, peacefully composed, and shed their tears. A little child with sunny locks—one for whom he had often fashioned rude toys and caressed—came to him too, and wound his chubby arms around his neck and kissed the pallid face, and called him "good, kind, old Jim," and other endearing names—and when he received no answer—sobbed and sobbed, as if his little heart would break, and had to be forcibly taken away from the scene. To their rough made shelter, the miners wandered out and left George Belden alone, with his suffering one and the dead.

CHAPTER XII.

SKAGGS' CONFESSION.

Then George bethought himself of the paper he had taken from Alice, and remembered having placed it next his breast. He drew it forth. It contained writing. The letters on it were large and misformed, and almost obliterated, for the paper was damp. He held it before the fire, spread it out and dried it. It was a letter dated some two months previous. By the light of the fire, this is what he read.

TO ALICE MERVILLE :

This is my confession ; the history of my wretched life. What I have to say will startle you, but do not scorn me--do not remember me with contempt and hatred. I am your father, and should you ever see the picture in my cabin you may know it is your mother. I feel that I am slowly dying, and have not many weeks of life, and for that reason I make this confession. I will let you know all. This letter I leave in my trunk, addressed to you my child, and I know it will be given to you, by those who find it. Twenty-one years ago--I was then no longer young--I loved a beautiful girl, Edna Wilton, your mother. Passionately did I adore her. Her father, Squire Wilton was the rich man of the village, and Edna, his only child was heiress. I was poor, and I thought to mend my

fortune by marrying her. The father was a pleasant old man, and I really liked him. One day I saved his life—it don't matter how—and he was grateful to me. He welcomed me to his house and made me his friend, but much as I tried I could not win the affections of the radiant being—peerless Edna Wilton. I soon found out she loved and was betrothed to another—one Henry Bainbridge, a handsome fellow—a true man, but oh; how I hated him; how I cursed him. Riches were almost in my grasp.

“By chance we met one day, on a railroad train. It was a dark night and it sped over a high trestle bridge. I went upon the platform to smoke, when who should I see there with his back to me, but my rival, enjoying a cigar. The wooden blinds at the forepart of the car were down. Then a fiendish thought came into my head. I could push him over into the rapid waters below and be free from him and when he was once out of the way would try and win the hand and money of the heiress. Acting upon the murderous thought, I tiger like approached him, and with all my power I sent him whirling over.

There was a thud and I knew he struck a beam, then a second after, he fell with a heavy splash, and sank beneath the river——”

Here there was a break, and the letters could not be made out. Conflicting emotions followed each other in the reader's mind. He was utterly dumfounded at the confession of crime. The fire was most out, and in order to read the rest, he held the letter closer to the flame.

He read on ; ——

“I hired two men to swear he had fought a duel, was killed and that the body was secretly taken away, and next day something to that effect appeared in the village paper. How Edna suffered; how she was wasting away by fretting for him ! I tried to console her—and at last I won the beautiful being, whom I loved. One day Squire Wilton died and he left the bulk of his property to Edna.

"I lived happily with her—and you, my daughter was born. Unluckily I speculated and lost, time and time again, ever borrowing from my generous wife, and at last all her fortune was gone. Then we had to give up the well appointed house, and remove to a squalled little shanty. It was about this time that Edna was not well, and she looked far from herself. One day I returned home beastly intoxicated—the first and last time in all my life.

"I heard a knock at the door and stumbled towards it, and was astounded to see, standing there he whom I thought murdered—Henry Bainbridge, but how changed. He was wasted almost to a skeleton, feeble and pale, and there was a long bluish mark upon his brow. He accused me of his attempted murder, and cursed me—the villain that I was—and reeling, he fell dead upon the floor. Though drunk at the time, I shall never forget the look Edna gave me, "Murderer," "deceiver," she said, "you shall atone for this," Maddened, I struck her with my open fist.

"She staggered as I gave her the cruel unmanly blow and upon her fair face was a crimson streak. Her eyes flashed; "coward" she exclaimed, "wretch that you are, I will not live with you another minute. Oh, why did I put my trust in you. God lets no guilty one escape, and you will surely receive your just deserts in the end. As for me, poor miserable being that I am, I can find my rest in the river's bed." With that, she took up her babe and vanished hatless through the door.

"When I became sober the night must have been far advanced. Then seated at a table in the corner, I realized what I had done. Had my darling really put an end to her life or would she ever return again, I thought. Suddenly in the midst of my reveries, the door opened and Edna stood in the room, with her hair tossed about her head, and an unnatural look in her eyes. Her babe was tightly pressed to her breast. She did not see me, but approached the form upon the floor and knelt by the side of her first love, caressed him and called him fond names, but could not wake him. Then she went from my sight

forever. I could not for the moment act. I was stupified. Then I went out and hunted high and low for her, but in vain. On returning I dragged out the body of Henry Bainbridge and dropped it in the river, flowing near my house. And then I fled the town with the curse of Cain upon my brow, and came to the thinly populated west where I intended to lead a lone life, but fate decreed otherwise. Somehow I afterward learned that Bainbridge was picked up in a boat and was taken a distance to a hospital where he was insensible and unknown. How he managed to creep away I cannot say.

"Edna must have fulfilled her threat and ended her miserable life in the river, for I never heard of her since that awful night. Often in the dead of night I awake with a start and imagine I see two forms before me. One of them is a man, haggard and ghostlike, with that dreadful mark upon his brow. With icy fingers he clutches my throat and hisses, "Murderer," "Murderer!" in my ears. The other resembles Edna, robed in white, all beautiful, but pale. But her hair is dripping wet and as she bends over me with the old reproachful look, drops of water fall upon me, and seem to penetrate my very soul like balls of moulden lead. Oh God! what I suffer. Wherever I go the awful cry of "Murder," "God lets no guilty man escape," ring in my ears like a death knell. I cannot rest. I will soon be crazed. I studied Analysis in hopes of being busily occupied and thus forget my troubles, but in vain. The moment I set my eyes on you and heard your name I knew you were my daughter.

But I will try and make some amends for my misdeeds, Beneath the tallest of the charred redwoods, I have buried a box. It is my gift to you. It contains my savings—enough gold to make you rich for life. Now, my sweet child, try to forgive and forget my fearful past. May God bless and protect you, is the wish of

Your father,

JIM SKAGGS."

George finished reading, and large tear drops rolled down his cheeks. Through the darkness he peered at the still dark body of the pioneer. Then his glance rested upon the insensible wife—father and daughter—destined never to know each other's love. "Darling Alice." Belden murmured, bathing her heated brow, "Poor Skaggs." Watching by the bedside he fell into a deep slumber.

The flickering fire went out.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIMMOND'S STORY.

Morning dawned. There were occasional showers in the forenoon, but towards the latter part of the day the rain ceased to fall ; the clouds rolled heavily away and the summer's storm was over.

George quickly communicated the contents of the letter to his friends.

They were completely astounded at the revelation. That Skaggs had been guilty of such crimes they never believed, but the confession was certainly true, for it was written in his handwriting. They knew he had led a miserable life and suffered great agony of mind of late and they were sorry that he was dead. To them the mystery of the new diggings was revealed. The old man had buried the treasure box for Alice, in the very spot the precious metal was found. By some unknown cause it had burst open and probably a few heavy showers had partly washed away the ground, revealing, here and there a nugget or so. Then Alice, passing by, would naturally have picked one up and imagined she had made a great discovery.

At about two o'clock, while the miners were talking over the incidents of Skaggs life, raking over the debris of the fire, and otherwise engaged, they were overjoyed to behold Bill Simmonds make his way into camp. Crawling upon his hands and knees, with evident pain, he dragged himself along and faintly cried for "food." He was cared for and made comfortable as possible. A luscious venison steak was placed before him, which he attacked quite ravenously. In reply to many questions, and between huge mouthfuls of the food, he told his story.

On the Fourth, late in the day, while the pleasure seekers were at Georgetown, he and the others that remained behind, were surprised to see a crowd of men, a villainous looking set—with picks on their shoulders, march into Skaggsville. They came from Pine Flat and were headed by a tall man with a hard lined face and sandy beard. "Whar's the diggins?" he demanded. The required answer was given and the fellows rushed off, pell mell, in the indicated direction. But they were hardly away a quarter of an hour before they came tearing back in great confusion and greatly enraged. They seemed like infuriated beasts and curses rent the air. They broke windows and doors in their madness and excitedly cried, "Burn the town!" "Down with Skaggs of Skaggsville!" They rushed for the old man's cabin. He had been asleep, but he was warned in time and snatching a rifle from the wall and taking a paper from his trunk, had vanished. He (Simmonds) and the two others desperately strove to defend the common property, but were overpowered by numbers, tightly

bound with heavy ropes, gagged and cruelly drawn over rocks and briars to an out-of-the-way place among the boulders. They could hear yells and rattling of crockery and glasses and knew the crowd was carousing in the saloon. It grew dark and then all was still for some time. The fellows were evidently sleeping off the effects of their debauch. After a time cries were heard again and a bright sheet of flame was seen and then Simmonds knew the town was on fire. At last the cries ceased. Satisfied with their horrible day's work the fellows, no doubt, had returned to the Flat. But not all, for the leader of the gang came to the captives, removed the gags and with curses and blows asked them to reveal the place of Skaggs concealment. But they did not know and even had they would not have divulged the secret. Then on hearing the wagon rattle into camp the villain again gagged the helpless ones and disappeared in the direction of the sound, thinking the arrivals "belonged to his crowd" as he stated on being taken prisoner.

At the conclusion, the narrator described the place where his unconscious companions were to be found, and the two were brought into camp more dead than alive.

Jim Skaggs was buried at sunset. It was a sad cortege that led the way through the forest to a sequestered spot.

At the roots of the pines—the whispering pines—they laid him to rest, and as the body was lowered the mourners stood around the grave with uncovered heads. Gradually the earth was thrown in upon the rude coffin, and soon all that was mortal of the beloved old man was entombed

forever. A slab of granite, which bears the following inscription was placed upon the spot by ready hands:

“HERE LIES JIM SKAGGS,
FOUNDER OF SKAGGSVILLE,
DIED JULY 5TH, 1879.
REST IN PEACE.”

* * * * *

Summer gave way to Autumn. Alice was on the sure road to convalescence. Her nervous system had received a severe shock and it was a hard struggle. For days she lay delirious, prostrated with a burning fever. Many times hope was given up, and imagine with what agony George beheld his loved one daily growing worse, sinking, sinking, till the dim spark of life was almost extinguished. But can you picture his joy when the symptoms were encouraging and pointed to the ultimate recovery. Thanks to the best of nursing, she was rapidly becoming her former self again. Daily her constitution improved. Her cheeks became fuller, her eyes regained their old time sparkle and the fever had almost disappeared.

Opening her eyes one morning her gaze fell upon her husband standing in the doorway, and her very first words were, “George” “Father.” At the sound he joyfully turned and in an instant was at her bedside. With one hand clasped in his, she asked to be forgiven for not telling him all, but he told her she had done nothing that called for forgiveness, and playfully changed the subject. Then there was a strange, startled look in her eyes, and he divining the meaning let her know her persecutor was

dead and there was nothing more to fear. The circumstances of his death he did not relate to her till long after they had settled in more prosperous parts. "But father—where is he" she asked him, and as much as she strove to appear calm, her voice faltered. George did not break the news to her at once; the shock, he thought might prove too great, and a relapse was to be feared.

Noting his hesitation she entreated him to tell her the worst—that she would endeavor to bravely prepare herself for bad tidings, So he gently broke the news to her and gave her a short account of Jim Skaggs death and burial.

"Have I found my father" was her only words," so soon to lose him—Oh! this is too cruel, but God's will be done," and she buried her face in the pillow and wept, George comforted and cheered her and when her grief had somewhat subsided, ~~and~~ talked of happy plans for the future.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST DAY IN SKAGGSVILLE.

It was a jolly little party, gathered in the cabin one day when our heroine was almost fully recovered. Familiar faces were around the fire. There was Alice vivacious, merry and pretty as ever. Belden was there of course, and our old friends Dave Holder, Ted Slocum and Simmonds.

It was their last day together. The above mentioned constituted at this time the entire population of the place. Mrs. Reilly, fully satisfied that Alice was entirely well, had reluctantly left for San Francisco the previous week. Here she stated she was on the eve of starting a boarding house, in company with a sister-in-law of hers, one Mrs. McMannus.

Long ago the others had departed, and now the remaining ones thought of leaving. Simmonds had just broached the subject and asked his cronies their plans for the future.

He was not answered immediately. Their pipes seemed to claim their entire attention. They smoked and smoked

as if their very lives depended upon it. At any rate the rising clouds of thick smoke, completely veiled each one's face and tear-filled eyes from the other.

Slocum at length broke the silence. He took his pipe from his mouth and drawing his sleeve across his eyes, said, "So soon, Billy, kinder sudden like, ain't it, but seems to me its 'bout time for us all to be going."

Then again, with increased ardor he began his smoking and puffed great clouds into the air, but too late to screen the large glistening tear drop that fell from his eye to the ground. Simmonds sitting near, noticed it.

"Why Teddy; bless me, yer crying!" exclaimed he.

"I admits it," was the reply. I'm not at all chicken hearted, but its kinder hard for me ter say farewell; you and the others wot's gone is the only friends I've got, and we've stood together through thick and thin. Think how we built up Skaggsville, and how many pleasant days we've spent together—But say Billy whar bound for?"

"Back East—to Maine."

"Sho—tired of Californy?"

"No, no, I'm thinking of coming back soon, You see I have a little gal waiting for me at home."

"A little girl!" was Slocum's exclamation.

"What married?" from George.

"Ah!" simply ejaculated Holder.

"So you really have a better-half," Alice said, "and to think you have never, in my hearing, mentioned a word concerning her— for shame."

If his questioners were surprised, Simmonds was decidedly more so. He looked at them with a puzzled, quizzical

expression. Then a light seemed to dawn upon him. "Married, wall I reckon not," he explained. "The gal is not my wife, but my—my (with a great effort) in-ten-ded, if that's what you calls it." With a merry laugh Alice explained that it was the correct word.

By this time all trace of tears had vanished and as a matter of course smoking had entirely ceased. In reply to a question Holder declared that he must leave that very day. "Me and Teddy," he said, "goes to Wood River—you've heard of Wood River, in Idaho, the place whar you can get nuggets bigger 'an your head. You see, long ago I bought a tract of land thar, from Uncle Sam, and I sold one half to Teddy, an'—"

"Yes," chimed in that personage, "You thought it wasn't worth nothing. You was glad to git rid of it, and you can't deny it. But its the best streak of luck I ever had in my life for —"

"Teddy, man, will yer keep quiet," Holder interrupted. "I'm got the floor now and I reckon I can tell this in my own way. But what d'ye think boys, big find made thar—rich gold—pans out nice. We two intend to go up and run this mine and if Bill wasn't going back home and George and his wife going to the city we'd invite 'em along an' divvy up. We'll soon be richer than Mackay, Jimmy Fair and all the Bonanza Kings put together, and we'll build a tony palace on Nob Hill in Frisco; hey Teddy old boy?" and smiling benignly upon his "pard," he gave him a vigorous dig in the ribs.

Now it so happened that Mr. Ted Slocum, the red haired, had his chair poised on the two hind legs and his

friend's poke came upon him so suddenly, unexpectedly, and with such force, that he lost his balance and went sprawling upon the floor with a thud, chair on top of him, feet elevated in the air, and in this very remarkable gymnastic attempt, broke his pipe and swallowed a mouthful of tobacco smoke.

He didn't get angry. He wasn't ruffled in the least. He was in the most felicitous mood imaginable. He saw his friends hold their sides with laughter and he followed suit. Sitting on the floor surrounded by portions of the broken chair, and comically rubbing a bruise on his head. he exclaimed "Je-ru-salem—but that *was* a fall an' no mistake. Davy's words is true, we'll be rich, sartin sure and we wont forget our friends neither."

Then somehow there was a very great amount of smoking, (tears too, let it be said, and with many earnest well wishes and handshakes they parted.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Dear reader have you ever been to Oakland? If so you must have noticed a well appointed two story residence on one of those streets that approach Lake Merritt. No gorgeous, cold palaces of money kings are to be seen on that poplar lined avenue, but handsome villas and cottages, with spacious verandahs, green lawns, gravelled walks, with a wealth of trees and flowers, all bespeaking the happiness and contentment of the possessors.

The dwelling to which I have reference is built in the Gothic style, and if anything it is neater in appearance than its many neat neighbors. A cool fountain dashes its spray around the well kept lawn, and rose and ivy vines creep up the portico.

Through the foliage one can catch a glimpse of the blue waters of the lake, with its small, gaudily painted craft, merrily dancing over the waves, and the green hills of Oakland Heights.

Let us pass the house as the sun is just setting in the West. But stop! Surely we recognize that figure on the

verandah, rocking to and fro in an easy chair. It is Alice Merville--no--I should have said Mrs. Alice Belden. The last rays of sunlight, struggling through the foliage covered lattice work, fall lovingly upon her slight figure. She is interested in a magazine but oft her eyes wander from the pages before her to a wee bit of a bonny babe, playing and cooing on the steps. This young gentlemen is James Skaggs Belden, aged about one year, his parents pride, the cutest babe in the neighborhood, and the best behaved. So his parents think him.

But who is that, coming up the walk with graceful rapid strides. Can we forget George Belden? He has evidently lost none of his good looks. Save his moustache, he is closely shaven, and attired in a business suit presents really a splendid appearance. One to see him now, would never recognize in him the miner of Skaggsville.

At the present writing he is proprietor of one of the most prosperous mercantile establishments of San Francisco, and by his open, square dealing ways has won the esteem of all who having dealings with him. Every morn and evening he crosses the bay for his office and his home.

Thanks to Alice, he is now a polished gentleman and has done away with all his blunt mining camp ways and manner of expression. She is his teacher for life now, and if she hasn't already completely reformed him has ample time for doing so.

Every summer they take a trip to Donner Lake, and other charming places, and they do not fail to go to the

loved old spot and visit the pioneer's grave and plant flowers upon it.

Simmonds has returned to California with a wife, and is prospering. He and Belden now own a large interest in the "Wood River Gold Mine" of Idaho, and from last accounts the latter was elected president of the company. The lucky stock holders rejoice for a large dividend has just been declared.

A short time ago I visited the Rubicon Valley for the last time. Pine Flat was deserted. Dust had accumulated and the rude log buildings were moss covered and crumbling away. With creaking sounds the doors swung on rusty hinges, as the wind rushed through the tenantless rooms. From the abandoned camp, I directed my steps to the site where once stood Skaggsville and crossed the bridge, now dilapidated and falling to decay. Then up the dusty and neglected road; and as I near my destination, I passed each well known land mark, the basalt wall, and look far down upon the fair vale beneath me and follow the course of the river till it appears in the distance, almost a silver thread.

As I leisurely walked along, beautiful deer with wide-spreading antlers, turned their soft languid eyes upon me, with inquiring looks, as if to question my right to intrude in their domain. The squirrels too, eyed me with distrust and at my approach nimbly scampered off and vanished in their burrows.

Reaching the ruins I stumbled upon a plank partly hidden in the ground, and on removing the debris reveal the assayer's sign, and many, many memories of the dead one came thronging through my mind.

The cabin presented a picture of desolation. It was doorless and roofless. As I entered birds of prey flapped their wings and with angry cries flew out, and past me a glittering serpent or two glided over the broken, scrubbery covered floor. Cobwebs hung from every log and beam, the furnace was demolished, and the broken, crumbling bricks were heaped about. Through a shady forest I wandered to Jim Skaggs' resting place. It was a charming spot—an open place in the midst of the pines, and they, like mighty sentinels, stood around the green, well-kept mound. Through all the livelong day the birds keep up their chirping.

Retracing my steps my thoughts wander to the peaceful Oakland home and the inmates, I rejoice to know that after their trials and heart pangs, they are enjoying well deserved happiness and bliss. To-day we find them honored and blest, beloved by all who come in contact with them, rich and poor alike—the happiest married couple in the Golden State.

THE END.

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